



HARD TIME IN MANNHEIM

Story by Denise C. Calabria
and Laurie Almodovar

AT the far end of Coleman Barracks stands an 8-foot-high chain-link fence topped with concertina wire. The only way through it is a double-locked gate, where a sign details visitors' dos and don'ts. To enter, visitors must surrender their ID cards at a guard shack located behind yet another locked gate.

Inside, one senses the looming authority imposed by the 9th Military Police Detachment. As the visitor passes from one block of cells to the next, the unnerving clang of a steel door slamming shut echoes down the shiny hall. The distinct smell of disinfectant stings the nose, and eyes adjust to the striped sunshine that filters through barred windows.

There's no mistaking this place for Club Med — and that's just the way MAJ Steve Lynch likes it. As commander of the 21st Theater Support Command's Mannheim Confinement Facility in Germany, Lynch insists on rigid security.

Officially known as the U.S. Army Confinement Facility-Europe, MCF was built in 1963 to house 236 inmates. Presently, 51 inmates or detainees (two of whom are women) call one of the cells "home." Comparable to a county jail, the facility can house inmates of all ranks serving sentences of less than

Denise C. Calabria is a public affairs specialist for the 21st Theater Support Command. Laurie Almodovar is the assistant editor of the 26th Area Support Group's "The Citizen."

one year or detainees awaiting trial.

"Our goal is to help inmates prepare to become productive citizens when released to civilian life or, in limited cases, returned to military duty," Lynch said.

MCF is the only U.S. military confinement facility in Europe, including the Balkans, except for a small Air Force facility in England. As a result, the facility is used for holding members of the Army, Air Force, Marines and Navy, as well as foreign prisoners of war. To tend to the mixed clientele, MCF has a cadre of Air Force and Navy correctional specialists assigned to its personnel roster.

Lynch and his staff focus on treating inmates' problems and respecting each person as an individual. Correctional philosophy at MCF encompasses the belief that behavior and attitudes are related, that people have the capacity to change and that people have the right to participate in actions that affect their lives.

But it would be a mistake to think this philosophy equates to a "touchy-feely" environment for prisoners, who are not allowed to approach or speak to cadre unless directed to do so.

"Discipline is the hallmark of what we do here," Lynch said. "It's an extremely controlled, disciplined environment and that's what we want ... an environment that the inmates do not want to come back to."

Currently, MCF's 116-member staff includes a confinement officer, social workers, a chaplain, various civilian employees and 99 military police officers (of whom 94 are assigned to the Army). It takes 30 military corrections specialists to operate the facility on each 24-hour shift, Lynch said. Even then, the guards on shift are outnumbered in the waking hours by about six to one, and by nearly eight to one at night.

The guards carry no weapons and rely on strict schedules to maintain

discipline and protect themselves. To show who is in charge, prisoners must stand at parade rest with their eyes forward and hands locked in the small of their backs when they are waiting outside their cells and work areas, explained MP SSG James Patrick.

Guards have the authority to interpret the disregard of rules as a threat, and will respond accordingly, he added. Since tension and stress are the prevailing moods, cadre support one another and reinforce each other's instructions to prisoners.

"Some inmates come in with attitude. We all get together at the gate and correct it there," Patrick said.

The staff trains in riot control and escape prevention. Lynch reported that no riots have taken place in recent memory and no serious incidents have

happened since he took command in 1998. He also noted that suicide, a common occurrence once the realization of incarceration sets in, has not occurred at MCF, due possibly to stringent assessments, counseling and suicide-watch procedures.

During inprocessing, new prisoners and detainees are placed in a barren, 6-by-8-foot cell in "D Block" for at least

the first 72 hours. They remain there 23 and a half hours a day with a camera watching them, and they are visited daily by a doctor, chaplain and social worker. Books and magazines are not allowed.

The "D Block" cells contain only a bed, sink and toilet. Prisoners who want to run water or flush must call the guard on duty, who controls these functions from behind the cells. When it's time for a shower, the guard unlocks the cell, chains the prisoners' ankles and wrists, and walks them to the shower stall at the end of the hall. The cadre controls even the length and temperature of showers.

If prisoners have completed inprocessing and show no reason for concern, they are assigned to another block with larger cells that can accommodate up to 13 prisoners. By the third day of confinement, prisoners are allowed to phone home at their own expense. Free calls to a prisoner's lawyer, commander or unit are allowed at any time.

It takes a special person to serve in a correctional facility, said MSG Cynthia LaVersa, chief of correctional supervision.

"It can be overwhelming when you think of the charges filed against these inmates — assault, rape or murder. Still, you must treat them as individuals — even when they or you are having a bad day." □

AN
ENVIRONMENT
THAT THE
INMATES
DO NOT
WANT TO
COME
BACK TO.